

Animal Rights, Cruelty Free, Protest Events and the Security Services.

A few years ago I received a letter through the old Royal Mail postal delivery informing me that I had been chosen to be the local Exeter representative of an organisation calling itself “Peta”. I was rather surprised because I’ve never been a member of “Peta” and, in fact, they are an organisation which I’ve never particularly liked.

I remember way back in the 1980s when Peta began. There were several prominent British groups concerned with animal welfare but Peta was a new one from the U.S.A. I immediately assumed that they were a C.I.A. front organisation constructed with the intention of infiltrating the British and European animal welfare movements to garner “intel” and, in turn, to corrupt and mislead by spreading disinformation. I have not changed my opinion of them in the last three and a half decades. I may be wrong about them or I may be right but I’ve never felt any desire to be open and trusting in these sort of matters.

That they would try to flatter me by making me their local representative when I’m not even a member of the damned thing only confirms my suspicions. I suppose they must have got my name and address from some instance of me signing some petition against animal experiments.

I have always assumed that “Peta” is pronounced to rhyme with “letter” or “jetter” or “go-getter-better-feta” but recently I’ve heard some people pronouncing the name to rhyme with my first name “Peter”. I find that very irritating.

The C.I.A. are based in the U.S.A. but, by all accounts, are not permitted to operate on American soil. There are other alphabet spaghetti organisations to do America’s domestic surveillance. The C.I.A., having developed out of the G2 military intelligence in the 1940s, is a bit like our M.I.5., M.I.6. departments and they work together through the “Five Eyes” international network: Britain, Canada, America, Australia, New Zealand.

In the 1980s when we were often marching through the streets of London, protesting against cruise missiles, apartheid, animal experiments, fox hunting, factory farming, trident submarines and so on, we would often hear of the activities of the various intelligence and surveillance groups and their infiltration activities. We had heard, for instance, that the “Special Branch” were not really police at all but actually intelligence agents who were permitted to wear police uniforms as part of their cover.

One time, in the mid-1990s, I was regularly campaigning against the Conservative government’s “Criminal Justice Bill”, getting signatures on a petition which was intended to be taken to County Hall when we had a sufficient number of names. However, when the time came, a small group of shady seeming men arrived to “join our campaign”, claiming that they were “on the left” and represented “the left”.

These pushy, bullying types insisted on changing the name of the protest from “The Campaign Against the Criminal Justice Bill” to a new thing which they had apparently just thought up and which they called “Kill the Bill”.

I saw immediately that they were trying to stir up trouble by re-christening our protest with a name which sounds like a double entendre threat to the police.

I declared that I refused to take part in the march to County Hall if people were going to be carrying banners marked with something as stupid as “Kill the Bill”.

The campaign had, up to then, been very polite and civilised and we had done a bit of street theatre with a “Mummers’ Play” script written by me and based on the Mummers of olden times. I had converted Saint George and the Persian Knight into a play called “Criminal Bill”. In the story Criminal Bill is the name of the villain who is defeated by my character “Old Father DaDa” and his seven sons. I wanted to subvert an old English traditional story at the same time as protesting against the new draconian police powers and making a stand in favour of travellers and the right to roam.

The march went ahead but without me.

In the months that followed after that march people told me that they “remembered me from the march”. That’s what some people claimed. That they “remembered me from the march”. Even though I had not been there and had actually made a great big thing of principle about not being there. That was how I was able to recognise some of the infiltrators. By their astonishing false recollections of me being somewhere that I definitely wasn’t and I had refused to be. Those people had been coached in what to say. It was what cop shows on the television would call “a stitch-up”.

I remember my earlier experiences of the sort of people who were on marches and protests. I remember the ones who seemed genuine and I remember the ones who seemed to be pursuing their own, different, agendas.

My first experiences of small protests with animal rights people were strange and didn’t make much sense. I remember being invited, in 1982, by Steve Boulding, and animal rights activist, to join him and Helen Steel on a little protest at a posh restaurant. I didn’t know what was going on so I just went along with them.

We walked into the restaurant, sat down at a table and waited. Steve told me to order pheasant or grouse or some such thing. I refused. He tried to bully me into ordering a dead bird from the menu, claiming that it would be an effective protest. I argued that ordering the murdered thing would make us all complicit in the murder. He insisted that it wouldn’t and I began to doubt his sanity. Eventually, since I wouldn’t budge on the matter and no-one else at the table wanted to do it either, we got up and left the restaurant. The people I was with all seemed to defer to Steve and he seemed to be stark raving mad. How was ordering grouse in a restaurant any sort of a protest? It made no sense.

The next thing they wanted me to do was to reconnoitre with them at a hospital which was said to be conducting animal experiments. We were supposed to walk around the hospital grounds at night time, Steve Boulding, Vivien Smith, and some others with me as the raw

recruit, on an operation to discover the best way for animal liberationists to rescue some animals from the labs.

Nothing much happened. We walked around, an alarm tripped some automatic lights, we walked back to the car. The real drama took place in the car as nutty Steve tried to convince me that I should give up my pacifism and join the A.L.F.

I argued that my whole reason for becoming a vegetarian in the first place was to extend the circle of my pacifist compassion for my fellow humans and, by extending that circle, to include other species. Thus I had taken a step up from simple human compassion to a wider, all embracing compassion for humans and other animals. Steve pooh-poohed this whole idea and insisted that violence was necessary to liberate the animals. We were both intransigent in our positions and the conversation ended with me deciding that we should agree to differ and leave it at that.

A few weeks later I attended an animal rights meeting in a hired room in Bloomsbury, Russell Square I think or somewhere around there if my memory serves me correctly. The building was the kind which any group could hire for pretty much any purpose. A notice board was there to remind us of an upcoming Anarchist Book Fayre.

At the meeting we sat in rows of chairs, the kind with canvas stretched over a modernistic metal tubular frame. In the middle of the meeting I suddenly got a sharp pain in my bum. It was the kind of sharp pain you get if somebody stabs you in the buttock with a needle. I hadn't felt that since secondary school when boys used to occasionally stab the boy in front of them in the bum with geometric compasses to make the boy cry out and get him in trouble with the teachers.

I turned my head sharply and looked around behind me to see who had stabbed me. The chairs immediately behind me were occupied by two little ladies who appeared to be completely innocent and harmless. I wasn't sure. If either of them had stabbed me they were certainly impressive deadpan actors. I said nothing and puzzled over it. Perhaps I had merely had a shooting pain in my bum and the old ladies were innocent. I couldn't be sure. From the speakers who led the meeting I learned that there was to be a big protest at the "Miss U.K." beauty contest at the Cunard Hotel in Hammersmith, London. The beauty contest was being used to advertise fur coats. The leaders of the meeting needed as many as possible to turn up at the contest and protest.

When the day of the protest came the activity consisted of entering the hotel with banners and placards and shouting anti-fur slogans. During the protest I was punched repeatedly in the side of my head by a bouncer employed at the hotel. After punching me into a state of shock and concussion he physically picked me up off of the ground and threw me away. I landed hitting my head on the floor and temporarily lost consciousness.

After I came back to consciousness I had a huge swelling bruise on the side of my head and I staggered around until I saw an elderly commissionaire restraining a young blonde woman by hold tightly onto her wrists. No-one else was restraining anybody at that stage of the protest and it seemed pretty clear that the old man was merely an opportunist pervert who was taking advantage of the situation to grapple with a young attractive woman.

I went towards them and, in spite of my pacifism pretended that I would knock the old guy's block off if he didn't let go of her. He replied, speaking very slowly and taking his time about it "I'm letting go of her...." Once I could see that she was free of him I walked away to see what else was happening.

I saw four uniformed police officers beating up nutty Steve Boulding. He was on the ground and had a policeman on each of his legs and a policeman on each of his arms. They were bouncing him up and down as if they were giving him "the bumps" on his birthday. Along with two other people, Helen Steel and Vivien Smith, I attempted to intervene, telling the police to leave Steve alone.

I also attempted to draw the attention of an audience to witness the police assaulting Steve. I was still suffering from concussion and shock so my attempts at attracting people's attention became rather surreal. I remember shouting any old nonsense that popped into my head, bits from science fiction books, doggerel, whatever I could think of. I must have presented a very strange figure to onlookers.

Helen, Vivian and I were arrested for obstruction. I was taken out of the building down an escalator with my arm in a hammerlock. The motion of the escalator caused a repetitive pulling movement because the officer arresting me was on one step and I was below him on the step in front. Each time the motion of the escalator slightly lengthened the space between the officer and me my arm, twisted behind my back, was pulled in an extremely painful way which caused me to cry out "Aaaaa" and each time this happened there was uproarious laughter from the audience of the beauty pageant. I was still in shock and concussion. I spent a few hours in a cell in Hammersmith Police Station. I was given no medical attention for the huge swelling and bruise on the side of my head.

When I was charged and released I emerged to the front foyer of the Police Station where a crowd of people were waiting. I was introduced to the defence solicitor but had to wait in line to speak with her.

While I was waiting, a blonde woman that I'd never seen before, unless she was the same one who had been held by the commissioner, said to me, "Come on! We're going!" (just as if she knew me), and she then turned and exited the building. I was puzzled. Why would somebody I didn't know at all want me to follow her out of the building?

The solicitor then spoke to me, saying, "Oh, you'd better go!" and she indicated the doorway where the unknown woman had just exited.

"No. I don't think so," I replied, puzzled. "I honestly don't know that woman at all". Then it was the solicitor's turn to look puzzled, "Oh but surely...." trailed into silence. The solicitor shrugged dismissively and we began setting up an appointment for legal aid. I went home and slept.

When I awoke there was still a huge swelling on the side of my head and I didn't emerge from my flat for several days.

The next time I saw Helen Steel and Vivien Smith I think they showed me a scrapbook containing a newspaper article about the protest and I think it had a "Gotcha" type of

headline. I can't be sure because I think I had one of my petit mal epileptic seizures as they were showing me the scrapbook and when that happens I always experience confusion and a loss of time. I do remember that we went somewhere on the underground, to see Steve Boulding I think. I remember that Helen and Vivien sat in two seats on the train with an empty seat between them. The obvious implication of this was that I should sit in the middle but I didn't want to do that because it seemed a bit symbolic, two women and the man sits in the middle. I didn't like that. I have strong opinions against gender stereotypes and traditions, symbolic behaviour and suchlike. I believe that tradition and symbolism are responsible for much of the problems in the world today. I have a strong dislike for any kind of behaviour which seems to be following a ritualistic stereotype in which men are supposed to play symbolic roles and women are supposed to function as some sort of "rewarder of the hero" and all that sort of thing. There are ritualistic patterns going all the way back to the stone age and beyond. Even to the behaviour of the apes who were our ancestors. I don't ever want to be falling in step with tradition.

I could remember a time from years before that, all the way back to 1973 when I was 20 and living with hippies in a squat just outside of Glastonbury and I walked into town with two of the people who lived in the house, two Swedish hippy girls called Marie-Louise and Gazelle. It had so happened that we were walking, on that occasion, with Marie-Louise on one side of me and Gazelle on the other. As we neared the top of Glastonbury High Street a bloke came around the corner (we would have called him a "straight bloke" in those days, meaning that he didn't look like a hippy). He saw the three of us, looked at the two girls, and said "Yeah, yeh mate, I'll 'ave 'em, I'll take 'em. How much?" It was obvious that he thought the two women were young prostitutes and that I was their "pimp". We laughed and shook our heads and hurried away from him.

That was 1973. But by 1982 I had had nine years to think of such things and I was very wary of falling into traps of traditional symbolism. I was quite sure that the problems in the world had been caused by people's traditional and conventional behaviour patterns and that, if we ever wanted change to come, it had to begin by overthrowing traditions.

In 1982 I was living in Larkhall Rise, Clapham, South London. I was 29.
It was a few weeks after the protest at the beauty contest.

I was visited by plainclothes officers from the local police station. They knocked on the front door at the stroke of midnight. No really! On the stroke of midnight!
I had been asleep all day, nursing my bad head. I got up in the late evening and had some breakfast. The doorbell rang downstairs on the stroke of midnight. After a few more rings it became clear that no-one else was going to bother answering the door so, like the fool that I am, I went downstairs to answer it.

A group of men with police warrant cards pushed their way into the ground floor hallway, asked me my name, and then said "Okay Pete, you know what this is about". I replied that I didn't know what it was about. They asked to see my flat. I agreed and led them upstairs and I consented to them searching my bedsit room (I had nothing to hide). They searched and found nothing of any interest. I had some artwork I'd drawn, a few books I was reading (such as "Without Feathers" by Woody Allen) and a Crass album. Nothing that the detectives were interested in.

I then consented to go with the detectives to the Clapham police station (of my own free will, mind you) to "answer some questions" and then when we got to the police station I was arrested and held overnight without charge or explanation.

I was in the police station for about 24 hours. They left me in a detention room, not a cell, so there was no bunk. A young black teenage boy with dreadlocks was in there with me for a while. Then they carried in a seemingly unconscious man dressed in the style of an old fashioned tramp. He had an old raincoat and an old hat and a long beard. He smelled of strong drink. He was carried in and placed on the little plastic bench which was bolted to the wall. That took care of the only seating in the room. The young Rasta boy and me had to sit on the urine smelling floor. The "tramp" continued his act of being unconscious while the lad and I talked and joked. The very odd thing about the apparent tramp was that his appearance was exactly the costume which Sherlock Holmes would wear when "undercover" in a film dramatisation. His performance would have been immaculate if he'd been in an amdrum production in a 1920s village hall.

Eventually, when the Rasta boy and stage tramp had been removed from the detention room I was left on my own again. The sun came up and light shone through the reinforced glass bricks which served as a substitute for a window. Then a new detective came and led me into his office where he declared that he couldn't understand why I had been brought in. I was obviously not the person they were looking for. He showed me the photofit picture of the person they were looking for, a skinhead who was suspected of rapes in the area. I had long hair so I obviously wasn't him.

This new detective moved me to an actual cell with a bunk and said he would see about getting me released. Hours passed. I snoozed on the bunk.

At one stage during that time I was accused of being "on hunger strike" just because I was vegan and they didn't have any vegan food there. The constable who had the job of taking food around to the cells claimed that he couldn't even do simple vegan bread and water, something that any jail in the world should be able to do. It was obvious that he was lazy and had the usual British police officer's prejudice against different lifestyles, cults, doctrines, diets and forms of dress. Like most British police officers he wanted everything in the world to be simple, tidy, neat, squared away and easy to understand without any intellectualism or "opinions" about things. His ideal like that of all of his type was to standardise everything into the basic uniform essence version of life without all this annoying "individuality" that people keep wanting. I already knew all about that way of thinking from six years of being brainwashed by Raymond Armin's "Emin" cult of Gurdjeffian "essence".

When I was released I walked back to the house where I lived, opened the front door, and found a letter waiting for me from a different police station. It said that nutty Steve Boulding had made a complaint against the police, to the effect that he had been assaulted by them, and that he had named me as one of the witnesses. So they wanted me to come and make a witness statement.

Then I understood.

The whole performance of the night before, the holding me in the police station without charges and all the weird things they had said and done while I was there were all intended to "put the frighteners on me" - to dissuade me from making that witness statement. But they had miscalculated. They must have thought the Royal Mail was quicker than it really is. They must have assumed that I would have already received that letter and would therefore know what they were doing. They also didn't understand human psychology because, far from frightening me away, the whole episode naturally had the exact opposite effect and I was twice as keen to make that witness statement as I would have been in any case.

So I duly went to Hammersmith police station and made my statement.

A few weeks after that we heard that the complaint against the police had stopped in its tracks because Steve had been convicted of taking part in some criminal activity with the A.L.F. and was going to jail for about 18 months.

Last I heard Steve was in Shropshire campaigning with the Green Party, Helen Steel became famous because of the "Mac Libel Case" and Vivien Smith had been to prison after taking part in some Animal Liberation Front operations.

I took part in some other protests such as Rock Against Racism and the Stop the City thing but I got sick and tired of being harassed by the Metropolitan Police in London and I moved back to Glastonbury at the end of 1983. My pacifism lasted until 1986 when I accepted, at last, the basic principle that we do sometimes have to fight in wars, even though we love peace.

I eventually decided that my attitude towards animals is different to that of the animal rights people. What I believe in is animal welfare, not animal rights.

The reason is pretty simple. I've tried lots of times to get a rational debate going on the details of what the contents of an Animal Bill of Rights would actually include and I've had no success.

People from both sides shy away from the debate.

The people who are in favour of animal rights don't want the debate because they think it's trying to trick them into watering down their ethics.

The people who are against animal rights don't want the debate either because they think it's trying to trick them into conceding something to the animals.

Consequently, with no rational debate available and only emotional attitudes on both sides I'm forced to shelve the whole concept and fall back on what I personally feel about it, which is simply that I'm against cruelty.

I don't describe myself as an animal lover but I'm against cruelty to animals.

I don't describe myself as a people lover but I'm against cruelty to people.

That's all.

Like Peter Singer I'm simply against cruelty. But I'm still open to the debate regarding bills of rights if the two sides ever want to get into it.